DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 197 417 CS 503 256

AUTHOR Glasser, Theodore L.
TITLE Play, Pleasure, and the Value of Newsreading.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 23p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (Ocean City, MD, April 24-26, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Patterns; *Communication Research; *Cultural Context; *Ethnography; Mediation Theory; News Media; *Newspapers; Play; *Reading Habits; *Recreational Reading; Research Design; Research Needs; Social Science Research; Sociocultural Patterns
IDENTIFIERS *Media Use

ABSTRACT

Offering a synthesis of research and thought on the notion of newsreading as a form of play, this paper focuses on newsreading as a symbolic action of incorporating cultural attitudes by reading a newspaper. Sections of the paper discuss the following topics: (1) play, culture, and communication--defining play in its cultural and communicative contexts; (2) newsreading as play--the pleasurable but disinterested state that an individual creates and fashions when reading a newspaper, the aesthetics of news, and the intrinsic value of newsreading; and (3) toward an ethnography of newsreading--the necessary shift in attention from the newspaper to newsreading, from empirical research on the use of newspapers to essays that present cultural analyses of the individuals who are doing the newsreading. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED197417

PLAY, PLEASURE, AND THE VALUE OF NEWSREADING

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Theodore L. Glasser

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Theodore L. Glasser
Assistant Professor

Department of Communication Arts
University of Hartford
West Hartford, CT 06117

An earlier version of this paper was presented to
The Mass Communication Interest Group of the
Eastern Communication Association
Ocean City, Maryland
April, 1980

CS503256

PLAY, PLEASURE AND THE VALUE OF NEWSREADING

Most of what we know about why people read newspapers--or why they don't --appears in terms incidental to newsreading itself. Typically, research on newsreading accentuates the extrinsic and the utilitarian and neglects the intrinsic and the aesthetic: the act of reading a newspaper--the immediately pleasurable quality of an experience--is itself seldom the subject of analysis.

Even the recent revival of empirical investigations of audiences uses and gratifications offers little in the way of comprehending the meaning and significanace of news consumption. With their roots in behavioral psychology and functional sociology, uses and gratifications researchers tend to "translate the aestehtic or cultural dimension of mass media consumption into an ill-fitting mechanical language of sociological functions, such as 'incidental learning,' and psychological functions, such as 'tension reduction,' instead of applying a model more appropriate to cultural experience" (5, p. 232). Virtually ignored, therefore, is the symbolic dimension of newsreading, the immediate value or disvalue of consumption--whether the experience of reading a newspaper proves gratifying or grievous. In the end, uses and gratifications research fails to link mass media functions with the actual experience of consuming them.

To be sure, the joy of consummation is often reduced to its simplest and most unsophisticated terms and thus emerges as unimportant or irrelevant and generally unworthy of sustained scrutiny. For example, having found little support for an "information-seeking" hypothesis, one recent researcher was left to conclude that much mass media content is simple and passively processed to "fill available time":

> People use the mass media for the same reason they attend a play, read a novel, play golf, or talk with family or friends. There

> is no need to resort to a theory of human needs other than perhaps the pleasure principle which characterizes economic theory. There is also no need to use a latent function theory to explain media use, unless we also attempt to construct theories of the functions of golf, tennis, or drama to social systems. People use mass media because they enjoy them. Little further explanation is needed (12, p.261).

That news is studied seriously only as it has an apparent effect or impact--that the newspaper is seen principally as an instrument of social control--reflects rather well a preoccupation with what Carey (3,4) calls a "transmission" view of communication, an essentially secular perspective which conceives communication as the transmission of messages over distance for purposes of extending control, influence, and power. Given an American proclivity to isolate science from culture and a general disdain for the symbolic significance of human activity, little attention is paid to a "ritualistic" view of social order, where communication is defined in terms of maintaining society in time rather than moving messages in space. Indeed, that newsreading is examined thoughtfully only as it is useful or gratifying in a non-symbolic sense underscores an intellectual aversion to the idea of culture,[1] a traditionally "weak and evanescent notion in American social thought" (3, p.7).

It is with remarkable tenacity, then, that William Stephenson continues in his efforts to promote a fundamentally subjective view of communication (27, 29); his "play theory" of newsreading (25,26, 28) stands out as the one genuine attempt to understand the meaning of the enjoyment newsreading engenders. Borrowing liberally from the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (13) and psychologist Thomas Szasz (31), Stephenson portrays newsreading as "communication-pleasure," a thoroughly absorbing and self-enhancing experience whose value lies not in

the information it imparts but in the sense of belonging it instills. For Stephenson, newsreading is--or at least can be--a form of play, an activity characteristically cultural in its implications.

Unhappily, Stephenson's treatment of play and its relationship to mass communication has not been widely and favorably received. Melvin DeFluer, writing in the American Sociological Review, found Stephenson's Play Theory of Mass Communication (26) irritating and pompous in its tone, poorly organized, and at times superficial (Book Review Digest 1968, p. 1276). Others have criticized Stephenson for using his play theory as a forum for " some largely irrelevant methodological questions" (3, p.21). At the very least, Stephenson's theory of newsreading suffers from a lack of serious attention and widespread apprehension about interpretive--as opposed to predictive--theories.

While Stephenson's work is at once both a compelling refutation of a "transmission" view of mass communication and a refreshing alternative to it, his thesis remains--as anthropologist Clifford Geertz would remind us--"intrinsically incomplete" and "essentially contestable" (10, p.29). Inevitably, Geertz observes, a semiotic concept of culture and an interpretive approach to the study of it yields only "defensible interpretations," not deduced "future states of a determined system"; in the end, the office of theory in the interpretive sciences is not to elucidate laws but to "provide a vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself--that is, about the role of culture in human life--can be expressed" (10, pp. 26-27). Stephenson's theory is an advance, therefore, not as it predicts or generalizes but as it leads to more incisive discussions and better informed and better conceptualized studies.

Accordingly, my objective here is not to test Stephenson's theory or arrive at any perfect consensus but to sustain the discussion and refine the terms of the debate. My goal, simply, is to penetrate further what Geertz (10, p.24) describes as "the unfamiliar universe of symbolic action"; to pro-

vide, specifically, a fuller evocation of the play dimension of newsreading.

Play, Culture and Communication

As Piaget found in his study of children, play is not behavior *per se* but an orientation toward behavior: "the tonality of an activity is ludic in proportion as it has a certain orientation" (21, p.150). Moreover, play is as irreducible as it is irrational; it is a fundamental category--primordial and autonomous--whose very existence defies the empirical world. Consequently, play is a "totality," a "thing on its own"; and "it is as a totality," Huizinga (13, p.3) cautioned in his classic study of play, "that we must try to understand and evaluate it."

Above all else, play is the antithesis of the ordinary. It refines experience and dignifies the individual. Unexceptionally, play is:

1. voluntary, not compulsive. "It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task" (13, p.8).
2. an interlude, a distraction, an interruption, a diversion, a *departure* from the day's burdens and responsibilities.
3. temporary, expressly circumscribed within limits of time and place (2).
4. immediately valuable, an end in itself. "When ever we play 'for the sake of' physical fitness, military training, or health, play has been perverted and has become merely a means to an end" (9, p.21).
5. inherently pleasurable. It is fun, but not frivolous; it is intrinsically satisfying, "which is not to say pleasing" (3, p.8).

6. governed by rules, which determine "what 'holds' in the temporary world of circumscribed play" (13, p.11).
7. developed and refined over time. Just as we learn to be human, we learn to play.

Play is symbolic and thus a distinctively human endeavor. While animals and infants "play," their play is mere motor play as opposed to symbolic play. However, by the second year of a child's development, when the child begins to use sounds and other behavior or objects as symbols instead of signs, play can then create something "make-believe" (21, pp.98-112). As an expressive form then, play is an invention of the imagination, an intentionally conceived illusion; it may well be, in fact, the "purest" of our inventions--all the rest, Ortega (20, p.192) points out, are more or less imposed on us, or prefigured for us, by a variety of demands and influences over which we have little control.

However, play does not stand in opposition to--or in isolation from--"what is real", rather, play vivifies the empirical world by investing it with meaning and significance. Play neither "re-presents" nor distorts the reality but instead articulates a reality. That is, we are all continually guided by a variety of realities--some created by our schools, others created by our churches, and still others created by our play. Significantly, these "multiple realities" may offer contrasting views or understandings of the same thing--in much the same way different maps bring the same environment alive in different ways by producing quite different realities (3, p.15). In other words, play is fiction--and thus "unreal"--only in the sense that a novel is fiction: both take liberty with "facts" but both can offer a clear and compelling understanding of the meaning and significance of the world in which we live. Or to use Carey's (3, p. 16) distinction, play functions as a symbol for reality--and not a symbol of reality--in that it creates the very realities it represents.[2]

Thus Huizinga (13) and Caillois (2)--and to a large extent Stephenson

(25, 26, 27) as well--err when they treat reality as corrupted play and play as devoid of reality. When Huizinga insists, ambiguously, that play and seriousness are two distinct and yet compatible categories, he fails to capture the essential relationship between play and the empirical world, a relationship more symbiotic than antithetical (1, pp. 89-93). Appropriately, Ehrmann (8, p.55) objects that "play cannot be defined by isolating it on the basis of its relationship to an a priori reality and culture":

> To define play is at the same time and in the same movement to define reality and to define culture. As each term is a way to apprehend the two others, they are each elaborated, constructed through and on the basis of the two others. None of the three existing prior to the others, they are all simultaneously the subject and the object of the question which they put to us and we to them.

Culture does not, therefore, depend on play, as Stephenson (26, p.46) would have us believe; and play does not precede society and culture, as Huizinga (13, p. 1) argues. On the contrary, play and the empirical world combine and interpenetrate to form what Fink (9, pp.23-28) calls the "magic dimension of illusion," an imaginary world "whose ontological meaning presents an obscure and difficult problem." In Fink's analysis, an understanding of play requires an understanding of the "enigmatic realm" of the play world, a tentative but exceptional existence where the individual encounters "not nothing" and yet "nothing real." Central to Fink's ontology of plays is the double nature of play, the fact that the individual plays in a very real world and at the same time contends with an imaginary world. While the play world is "nothing real," it requires a "real setting" and has an "absolute need for real things as a point of departure" (9, p.24); while play is a creation of

the imagination and "is not the result of a true or false relationship of the subject to the objects," it is very much rooted in "the concrete world around us" (9, pp.26-27). Necessarily, the individual at play adopts a kind of double identity, a peculiar "schizophrenia": the individual at play is at once both the player and the plaything--the individual who plays (the subject) and the individual created by the role in that play (the object).

Although the illusion created by play neither denies nor obscures "what is real," the play world itself certainly and creatively defies the empirical world by suspending it and by substituting for it a world of significance and order; as Fink (9, p.28) concludes, the play world-as-illusion is not a deceptive subjective impression or a perceptual trick but "the symbolic act of representing the meaning of the world and life." Thus in contrast to Huizinga, who claims that play antedates culture, Ehrmann and Fink view play as both a manifestation and expression of a society's values, customs, and traditions; a phenomenon "coextensive with and reflective of culture as a whole" (1, p. 89).

Communication as Play

Communication, Dewey (7) reminds us, is at once both instrumental and consummatory. As instrumental, communication is a phase of action; its value lies in the foresight it affords. As consummatory, however, communication is enjoyed for its own sake; its value lies in enhanced sense of self and the feeling of association it engenders. As Carey (3) recognizes, the instrumental and the consummatory are the two principal dimensions of communication; one neither confirms nor denies the other. The difference between the two, however, is as fundamental as the difference betwen action and appreciation, doing and enjoying.

Overwhelmingly, communication as play is gratifying in a consummatory

sense; it is characteristically final in that it is an immediately pleasurable and inherently valuable experience, what Dewey (7, pp. 204-205) would describe as "a sharing in the objects and arts precious to a community, a sharing whereby meanings are enhanced, deepened and solidified in the sense of communion." That is, as an affective experience, play fosters introspection and reflection; and as an experience whose form we share with others, play instills a feeling of community, "an enhanced sense of membership in a congenial whole" (7, p.206).

As symbolic form, play constitutes meaning; and meaning--not modes of organic behavior--is the essence of human communication. Through the power of symbolization, play conquers the ambiguities of the empirical world and transforms it into something comprehenisble: a world of right and wrong, good and bad; a world which distinguishes between important and unimportant, significant and insignificant. Play is primarily expressive and thus communicative, it follows, not as it conveys information but as it enhances our understanding of ourselves and aids in the recognition of and appreciation for our status and significance in the larger society.

In sum:

> if the realities we create are brought into existence through the "construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms" (3, p.12);
> if these symbolic realities come to define our culture;
> if play is a symbolic form; and
> if symbolism is the medium of communication;
> then play is indeed communication; and play as communication constitutes "one of the supreme dimensions of culture" (19, p. 192).

Of course, not all communication is play; but decidedly all play is

communication. Thus Ehrmann (8, p. 56) states the case succinctly when he suggests that any theory of play implies a theory of communication: "Just as culture is, in the last analysis, communication, so is play."

Newsreading as Play

One of Stephenson's (25, p. 368) most telling observations is that newsreading is a complex skill, "the importance of which is little understood." Reading the day's news for enjoyment--playing in and with communication--requires a certain aptitude, an ability to "see the story through the facts," so to speak; a capacity for appreciating images, not just assimilating information. Analogously, anyone can read Chaucer or Shakespeare but not everyone will truly enjoy the experience: reading as an instrinsic delight--consumption as an immediately pleasurable activity--is an acquired taste developed over time and only with experience.

To be sure, not everyone reads a newspaper only or always for enjoyment; and yet, Stephenson suspects, a good many readers--perhaps most readers--exhibit the earmarks of play. For Stephenson, it is not a joke to say people lose themselves in their newspapers. Skillful readers become deeply absorbed in their newspaper; they enter into a kind of "ludenic trance" [3] (26,pp. 158-159). Consequently, Stephenson finds the earlier research on newsreading--especially studies by Schramm (22) and Kay (15)-- to be at odds with "the facts about newsreading." Schramm's "immediate pleasure reward" versus "delayed reality reward" theory of newsreading is, in Stephenson's (26, p. 58) view, based on the groundless supposition that our "organizational complexities" predict the rewards we seek and thus the news we read. And Kay is taken to task for proposing what is essentially a theory of learning: the motive for newsreading, according to Kay (15, p.32), is "to obtain new information, either because

that information will be applied toward the solution of a problem, or because it evokes images that are different from images already stored in the reader's memory." Neither theory, Stephenson laments, explains why so many people continue to read newspapers even when the newspaper offers them nothing vitally new or useful. Why, Stephenson (25, p. 368) wonders, do people watch a football game, then watch excerpts of the same game later in the day, and then "read about it again the next day in the newspaper and are delighted to read further commentaries about it the day after that again"?

Communication-Pleasure and the Disinterested Reader

To aid in his conceptualization of newsreading as play, Stephenson employs Szasz's (31) study of the psychology of pain and pleasure. In an interesting departure from traditional approaches to the study of "bodily feelings," Szasz suggests that one of the unifying concepts around which pain and pleasure can be ordered is communication. Pain and pleasure are not necessarily and always sensations "passively undergone or endured"; at times, Szasz (31, p. xlii) demonstrates, they are experiences "actively created and fashioned" by the individual. As affective states, pain and pleasure function more as symbols than signs in that they do not signify, say, organic malfunctions but express an individual's sense of self. Pain, for example, may symbolize discomfort, unhappiness, a lack of faith in the self. Pain calls for change; it prods us into action aimed at alleviating pain and restoring pleasure. Pleasure, conversely, calls for a cessation of action; as Szasz (31, p. 203) puts it, pleasure is "a command for the persistence of the status quo." A pleasurable state is good, an end in itself; and I feel good," Szasz (31, p.223) observes, gives rise to the conception "I am good."

The use to which Stephenson puts Szasz thus becomes apparent: play

is an example of a pleasurable affective state created and fashioned by the individual. More to the point, play leads to "ego-object integration"; its value, as Szasz (31, p. 211) might describe it, "lies in the feeling of the experiencing ego of being harmoniously at one with its object (e.g., God, Church, religious community, nation, family)."

To underscore the communicative importance of play and pleasure, Stephenson develops Szasz's concept of "communication-pleasure," which holds that play, like pleasure, "has little gain for the player except in self-enhancement" (26, p.3). Largely a matter of "contentment, serenity, delight, such as is characteristic of entertainment, art, drama, conversation, sociability, and the like," communication-pleasure requires no action, no work--except, perhaps, what little effort is needed to sustain the experience. Its counterpart, "communication-pain," imposes on the individual a sense of responsibility and commitment; it is "a command for work and action, for effort and production" (26, p. 194). Dialetically, communication-pleasure and communication-pain stand in opposition to each other; conceptually, the difference between the two corresponds roughly to Dewey's distinction between communication as consummatory and communication as instrumental.

At its best, then, communication-pleasure is "a step in the existential direction" (26, p. 45); as play, newsreading is a liberating experience, the importance of which transcends the utility or usefulness of the newspaper. Never self-involved in the sense that "it matters to us, as self, to our sense of pride, conceit, or the like," the reader is "free" to be thoroughly absorbed and thus self-enhanced: "when one is absorbed in doing something, like reading a newspaper intently, all sense of self is absent; afterwards you may say how much you enjoyed it, but at the time there was no self-reference, no pride, no vanity . . . no intrusion of the self upon the news" (26, p.51).

Thus for newsreading to be pleasurable, the reader must be--at least

for the moment--disinterested. Not bored, uninterested, or indifferent, the disinterested reader achieves a degree of self-distance, a stepping away from the needs and desires and other concerns extrinsic to reading itself (23, pp. 316-319). In principle, Mead (19, p. 279) illustrates this well: "The artisan who stops to sense the nice perfection of a tool or a machine has interrupted its use to appreciate it. . . . He is not interested in its employment, he is enjoying it." But unlike Mead's artisan, who may only on occasion find himself in a playful mood, reading a newspaper is an expected interruption, one to which we look forward to with an unmistakable regularity. "For the habitual newsreader," Stephenson (25, p. 370) observes, "a newspaper stands outside the immediate satisfactions or needs of the day--it interrupts one's daytime activities rather than otherwise. Yet one reads a paper regularly, recurrently: it becomes a part of one's way of style of life."

Being disinterested also means stepping away from instant gratification. Clearly, nothing as primitive as a lewd photograph or a catchy headline is likely to induce a pleasurable affective state. Play is not, Stephenson (26, p. 31) cautions, a matter of "instinctive or gross impulses of the human being." Communication-pleasure does not imply fun in a frivolous sense. On the contrary, play is serious enjoyment; something more refined, more developed, more sophisticated than an entirely salacious response. In its most developed form, newsreading carries us into the realm of the reverie and projects before us a world of contending forces, a "presentation of reality that gives life an overall form, order and tone" (3, p. 8); it adds distinction to utility.

The Aesthetics of News and the Value of Newsreading

Just as various kinds of play can be ranked from least to most perfect (20, p. 193), the evolution or development of a particular form of play, following Caillois (2), can be arranged along a continuum from paidia, which is

spontaneous, makeshift, tumultuous and exuberant play, to ludus, which is calculated, contrived and subordinated to rules. Formally, Stephenson makes little use of Caillois' typology; conceptually, however, Stephenson portrays newsreading as a function of maturity and sophistication, ranging from the "scatter-brained" reader whose play lacks order and regularity to the "highly-developed ludenic" newsreader whose play becomes something of a ritual.

But a player's competence alone will not determine the quality of the play experience. Be they scatter-brained or highly-developed, newsreaders depend as much on the extrinsic quality of the playworld--conditions and factors which promote or hinder a playful experience--as they do on their own imagination and creativity. Although Stephenson examines in some detail the consequences of a newspaper's layout and design, he regrettably ignores the most fundamental "plaything" of all: the aesthetic quality of newswriting, whether the day's news, as Mead (19, p. 302) puts it, "serves to interpret to the reader his experiences as the shared experiences of the community of which he feels himself to be a part."

Decidedly, nothing as mundane as an editor's pledge to fairness or a reporter's commitment to truth will explain a newspaper's lasting appeal. Rather, what attracts the loyal and habitual reader--indeed, what induces self-absorption and enhances the opportunity for an elaborately symbolic experience--is a newspaper's effort to capture and express a community's values and traditions, to align itself with its readers' aspirations, aims and beliefs. More to the point, how the day's news is presented--its form --accounts for its aesthetic appeal (11). Only the primitive and inexperienced reader would be aesthetically attracted to the news report, a genre of journalism whose form consists largely of the "bare facts" arranged in descending order of importance. The experienced and skillful reader would much prefer the context and continuity of the news story, a narration whose form transcends its

value as information. In other words, the imagery a journalist creates, not the facts a reporter presents, seizes the imagination of the reader and shares with the reader a reality that in some way interprets or diagnoses the ideals of the community; as a self-contained whole, the news story--in contrast to the news report--assumes an importance of its own, especially when it captures the social experiences of readers and provides the gratifications of those experiences as shared by the community to which they belong. News is aesthetically appealing, in short, not as it informs but as it heightens our appreciation for what Mead (18, p. 154) calls the "generalized other," the "organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self."

And when readers find news aesthetically appealing, newsreading itself becomes something of an aesthetic experience, or at least an experience with an aesthetic dimension. Playfully and thus symbolically, newsreading becomes a dramatic commentary on--and a compelling reenactment of--communal traditions and values:

> as the reader makes his way through the papers, he engages in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus. A story on the monetary crisis salutes him as American patriot fighting those ancient enemies Germany and Japan; a story on the meeting of the women's political caucus casts him into the liberation movement as a supporter or opponent; a tale of violence on the campus evokes his class antagonisms and resentments (3, p.8).

Through its capacity to dramatize the empirical world, newsreading as play transforms the newspaper into something more than mere information; as a convincing representation of a community's character and vitality, newsreadings as play instills a sense of integra ion, a fusion of the individual with his or her surrounding's (17, p. 48). As an aesthetic experience--aesthetic in the sense of being contemplative as well as creative--newsreading reflects and pro-

jects culture; it contributes to the maintenance of community and gives rein to an enhanced sense of self.

In sum, reading a newspaper can be thought of as aesthetically appealing only when it "infuses meaning" into the detail of experience: "A genuine aesthetic effect is produced," Mead (19, p. 304) explains, "if the pleasure in that which is seen serves to bring out the values of the life one lives." And this "genuine aesthetic effect" constitutes the summum bonum, the cultural and ultimate value of newsreading.

Toward An Ethnography of Newsreading

Only experience, the philosopher, C. I. Lewis (16) tells us, is of intrinsic value; everything else can only be extrinsically valuable. Thus the intrinsic value of newsreading is not to be confused with the extrinsic value of the newspaper, in much the same way the value of drinking water is not to be confused with the value of water.[4] In less opaque terms an ethnography of newsreading calls for the study of readers doing reading, not readers using their newspapers.

Folowing Geertz (10), an ethnographic analysis of newsreading would involve both "inscription" and "specification." By inscription Geertz means, literally, inscribing social discourse, writing down in the form of a text "the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are"; and by specification Geertz means diagnosis, an explicit interpretation of "what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found, and beyond that, about social life as such" (p. 27). In short, the double task of social anthropology is to uncover the "said" of social discourse, "the conceptual structures that inform our subjects' acts"; and to

"construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures. . . will stand out against the other determinants of human behavior" (p. 27). As such, "doing ethnography" is nothing more or less than an intellectual enterprise. Not defined by techniques or procedures, the essay is the natural genre in which to present anthropological or cultural analyses.

As a point of departure, Stephenson's efforts to objectify and quantify subjective behavior--his Q-technique (24)--may prove useful; for as Szasz (31, p. 211) advises, it is important to differentiate and expressly state what are phenomena belonging to the "domain of affects" and what are "judgments of the observer or of the society." But as Stephenson (30, p. 647) acknowledges, his technique and its methodology "in no way replaces the imaginative mind of anyone"; at its best, Q-technique "merely offers some objective facts which imagination can take into account." In the final analysis, it remains the task of the ethnographer to provide "thick descriptions" and compelling interpretations.

That most of what has been written about newsreading is not immediately germane to the <u>experience</u> of newsreading underscores the need to shift our attention from a transmission view of communication to a view more compatible with ethnographic description, a perspective which views "reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more like attending a mass: a situation in which nothing news is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed " (3, p. 8). Studies of the symbolic dimension of newsreading can only emerge, however, as we abandon the assumptions and prejudicial vocabulary of positivism and begin to adopt new assumptions and new ways of talking about mass communication. And this requires nothing less than new modes of inquiry, scholarship as subtle in its observation as it is convincing in its interpretation. More importantly, it requires a return

to the essay as a legitimate and publishable form of analysis, a mode of inquiry long held in disrepute by students of American journalism.[5]

If in fact individuals "live in a community in virtue of the things they have in common," as Dewey once observed, and if "communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common" (6, pp.6-7), then to study newsreading <u>is</u> to study culture and communication. Indeed, newsreading stands out as one of the most pervasive forms of social communication; surely it must be something more than the "horrendous and formless ritual" Huizinga (14, p. 243) described well over a half century ago.

NOTES

1. "This intellectual aversion to the idea of culture," Carey (3, p. 7) explains, "derives in part from our obsessive individualism which makes psychological life the paramount reality. . . " Also, "We understand that other people have culture in the anthropological sense and we regularly record it--often mischievously and patronizingly. But when we turn critical attention to American culture the concept dissolves into a residual category useful only when psychological and sociological data are exhausted."

2. Carey (3, p. 16) illustrates. "A blueprint of a house is one mode of a representation 'for' reality: under its guidance and control a reality, a house, is produced. . . There is a second use of a blueprint however. If someone asks for a description of a particular house, one can simply point to a blueprint and say, 'That's the house.' Here the blueprint stands as a representation or symbol of reality. . . "

3. The word "ludenic," derived from the latin word "ludic", is Stephenson's invention.

4. Lewis (16, p. 427) explains: "Although the immediate value of which characterizes presentation of water when we are thirsty, is one indispensable factor of an objectively correct valuation of a body of water near a city, nobody is misled into supposing water a more valuable commodity because he happens at the moment to be thirsty."

5. According to the "Instructions for Contributors" published in Journalism Quarterly, (57, Spring, 1980), a wide "variety of methodological approaches" does not include the essay: "Our emphasis on research does mean that we do not normally accept essays" (p. 201).

REFERENCES

1. Anchor, Robert. "History and Play: Johan Huizinga and his Critics." History and Theory XVII, 1978, pp. 63-93.

2. Caillois, Roger. Man, Play, and Games (M. Barash, trans.). New York: Schocken Books, 1961.

3. Carey, James W. "A Cultural Approach to Communication." Communication 2, 1975, pp. 1-22.

4. Carey, James W. "Mass Communication Research and Cultural Studies: An American View." In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, and J. Woollacott (Eds.) Mass Communication and Society. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977, pp. 409-425.

5. Carey, James W. and Albert L. Kreiling. "Popular Culture and Uses and Gratifications: Notes Toward An Accommodation." In J.G. Blumler and E. Katz (Eds.) The Uses of Mass Communications. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974, pp. 225-248.

6. Dewey, John. Democracy and Education. New York: Macmillan, 1916.

7. Dewey, John. Experience and Nature. New York: Dover, 1958.

8. Ehrmann, Jacques. "Homo Ludens Revisited." In J. Ehrmann (Ed.) Game, Play, Literature. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, pp. 31-57.

9. Fink, Eugene. "The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play." In J. Ehrmann (Ed.) Game, Play, Literature. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, pp. 19-30.

10. Geertz, Clifford. The Interpretation of Cultures. New York: Beacon Press, 1973.

11. Glasser, Theodore L. "The Aesthetics of News." ETC.: A Review of General Semantics 37, 1980.

12. Grunig, James E. "Time Budgets, Level of Involvement and Use of the Mass Media." Journalism Quarterly 56, 1979, pp. 248-261.

13. Huizinga, Johan. Homo Ludens. Boston: Beacon Press, 1950.

14. Huizinga, Johan. America. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.

15. Kay, H. "Toward An Understanding of News-Reading Behavior." Journalism Quarterly 31, 1954, pp. 15-32.

16. Lewis, C.I. An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1971.

17. Mansell, Maureen. "Dimensions of Play Experience." Communication Education 29, 1980, pp. 42-53.

18. Mead, George Herbert. Mind, Self, and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

19. Mead, George Herbert. "The Nature of the Aesthetic Experience." In A. J. Peck (Ed.) The Selected Writings of George Herbert Mead. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964, pp. 294-305.

20. Ortega y Gasset, Jose. Phenomenology and Art C.P.W. Silver, (trans.) New York: W.W. Norton, 1975.

21. Piaget, Jean. Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood. (C. Gattegno and F.M. Hodgson, trans.). New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.

22. Schramm, Wilbur. "The Nature of News." Journalism Quarterly 26, 1949, pp. 259-269.

23. Sennet, Richard. The Fall of Public Man. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

24. Stephenson, William. The Study of Behavior. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

25. Stephenson, William. "The Ludenic Theory of Newsreading." Journalism Quarterly 41, 1964, pp. 367-374.

26. Stephenson, William. Play Theory of Mass Communication. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

27. Stephenson, William. "Foundations of Communication Theory." Psychological Record 19, 1969, pp. 65-82.

28. Stephenson, William. "Play Theory and Value." In L. Thayer (Ed.) Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1973.

29. Stephenson, William. "Concourse Theory of Communication." Communication 3, 1978, pp. 21-40.

30. Stephenson, William. "Homo Ludens: The Play Theory of Advertising." Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali XXVI, 1979, pp. 634-653.

31. Szasz, Thomas S. Pain and Pleasure. 2nd Ed. New York: Basic Books, 1975.